

## 4.7 Beyond the ''Tsunami''

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*language in universities.*

Graham Williams, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10/1/91

One university after the other, which hitherto had no Japanese program, began to offer Japanese studies programs. The notable characteristics of the new programs were that the academic coordinators were all conscious of Australia's specific need for Japan-related skills and literacy. They endeavoured to design the program in line with the three areas of intellectual development prescribed by Stockwin.

The 1987 major study by AJRC, led by Drysdale, was generally optimistic about the direction Australian universities were taking towards the fulfilment of universities' role in the cultivation of Australia's Japan skills and literacy. (Drysdale, et. al. 1987b)

#### 4.7 Beyond the *Tsunami*

The holistic effects of the *Tsunami* of 1988 were never researched extensively amongst the Japan scholars in Australia. For one reason the effects were so visible and obvious to those involved in Japanese studies, that the need for research did not arise. The other reason seems to be that the Japanese academia all around the country became totally occupied in coping with the effects of the *Tsunami* and were left with little time to objectively study them.

The products of the 1988 tsunami are clear in numerical terms. The number of institutions offering a Japanese program dramatically increased in response to the swelling number of students. Eighteen (18) universities and higher institutions<sup>17</sup> in Australia offered Japanese programs before the *Tsunami* in 1984 (Embassy of Japan 1984). The number jumped to twenty eight (28) in 1988, the year of the *Tsunami* (Leal, et. al. 1991). By 1993, thirty three (33) institutions in the country offered a Japanese program. In other words, all the Australian higher institutions except three had established Japanese programs by that year (Marriott, et. al. 1993).

The following table shows the overall increase of Japanese learners in

Australia between 1984 and 1993, the ten year period including the years prior to and after the *Tsunami*.

**Table 4: Increase in the Number of Japanese Learners in Australia between 1984 and 1993<sup>18</sup>**

	1984	1990	1993
Tertiary Level*	1,049	6,387	9,697
Pre-tertiary Level	17,274	55,091	161,185
Others	1,466	545	8,359
Total	19,789	62,023	179,241

\* Tertiary level here includes students enrolled in universities, higher education institutions and TAFE colleges.

Within ten years, the student number in Japanese programs both at the tertiary and pre-tertiary level increased by nearly ten-fold. Such dramatic growth in a relatively short period naturally brought with it many difficulties and problems. As Drysdale described, the immediate impact of the *Tsunami* was 'a sense of genuine crisis' amongst the Japanese specialists around the country (Drysdale 1989).

In the end, however, the *Tsunami* resulted in a great expansion of Australia's Japanese studies. The existing programs were consolidated and expanded. A large number of new programs were introduced all around the country, giving access to a greater number of people who hitherto had no access to the formal study of Japanese. Furthermore, the definition of what Australia needed in terms of its Japan skills and literacy became clearer in the mind of Japanese academia in Australia. Consequently many new programs, as well as a large part of existing programs, were designed specifically to suit Australia's requirements. A firm and broad foundation was now established for the future development of Australia's study of Japan and its education.

The great wave of the tsunami also brought to surface a number of major issues facing Japanese studies in Australia. They included academic and educational issues, universities' responsibilities to the community, and their relations with public and private sectors. Through sorting out the

priorities amongst the mounting issues and trying to cope with expanding student numbers at the same time, Australia's Japanese academia had to re-examine fundamental issues concerning Japanese studies. Fundamental questions, such as Japanese studies for whom and for what purposes, brought forward fresh discussions.

Having overcome the initial crisis of the *Tsunami*, much of the 1990s, therefore, was given to identifying and re-defining vital issues concerning Japanese studies. One of the welcome results of the *Tsunami* had been the great expansion of the professional body of Japanese studies academia in Australia. Australia's Japan scholars could now discuss issues on a much broader basis, and from more diverse points of view. Interaction and active discussions amongst Japan scholars were important, if the studies of Japan were to continue their development and respond to Australia's need in the 1990s and beyond.